A Service-Learning Curriculum Unit © 2026 Embarc This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Embarc

Program Overview

Empowering Minds, Building Achievement, Reconnecting Communities

Welcome to Embarc's Program Overview. This guide provides Embarc's curriculum outline, progression of stages by academic year, learning goals, and classroom lesson topics. In addition, the teacher support section details how the Embarc Instructional Coaching Team supports teachers throughout the course of program implementation.

Empowering Minds, Building Achievement, Reconnecting Communities

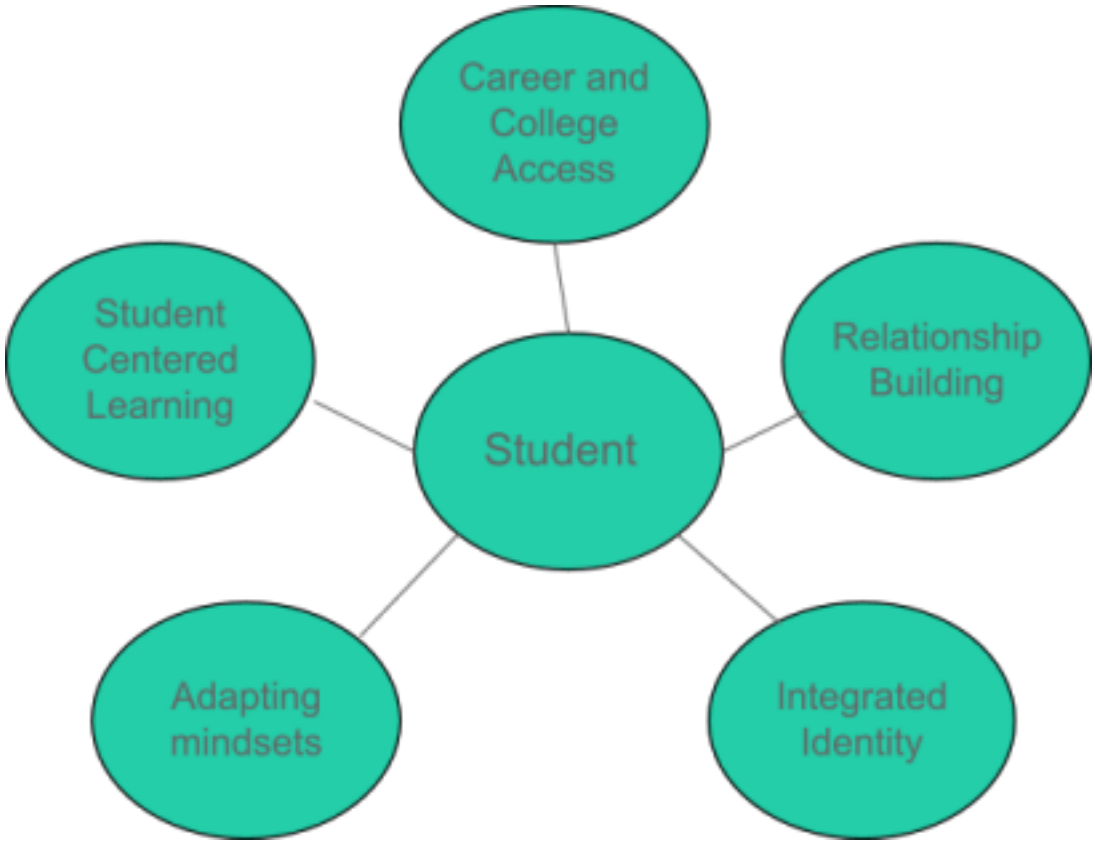
© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Program Overview

Embarc is regarded as one of the most exciting nonprofits specializing in immersive learning experiences that connect Chicago communities with students in order to close the experience gap. In ten years, Embarc has grown from a single pilot at Harper High School in the West Englewood neighborhood to a highly demanded social and cultural education program serving 20 Chicago Public Schools and over 5,000 students. Embarc demonstrates the important role of experiences, exposure, and social interactions in driving achievement, especially for underserved students.

Embarc's Focus Areas in the Classroom:

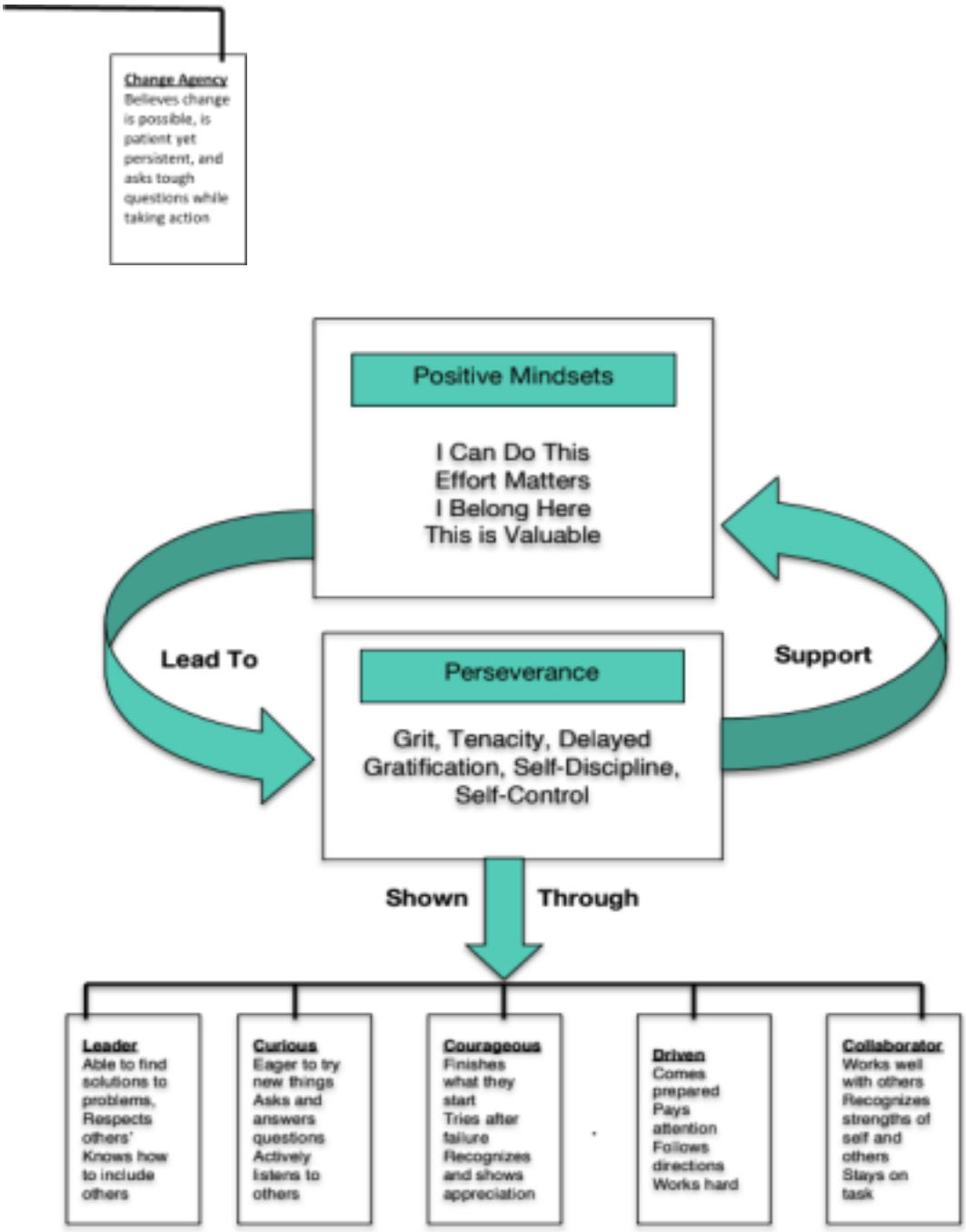
© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0



Embarc's Curriculum Mission

Embarc's curriculum prepares students for post-secondary success by changing the way students view themselves and their place in the world. The classroom experience accomplishes this mission through college and career exploration, student centered learning, interventions to change mindsets, reflective activities to support students gaining an integrated identity - a sense of internal consistency of who one is across time and across multiple social identities, and opportunities for peer-to-peer and adult-to-student relationships.

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0


Change Agency
Believes change is possible, is patient yet persistent, and asks tough questions while taking action
Positive Mindsets
I Can Do This
Effort Matters
I Belong Here
This is Valuable
Lead To
Support
Perseverance
Grit, Tenacity, Delayed Gratification, Self-Discipline, Self-Control
Shown
Through
Leader
Able to find solutions to problems, Respects others' Knows how to include others
Curious
Eager to try new things Asks and answers questions Actively listens to others
Courageous
Finishes what they start Tries after failure Recognizes and shows appreciation
Driven
Comes prepared Pays attention Follows directions Works hard
Collaborator
Works well with others Recognizes strengths of self and others Stays on task

Curriculum Overview

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

The curriculum is divided into four Stages, based on the action reflection cycle. As the stages progress, students become more independent learners and thinkers. The lessons and activities are designed to create curious, courageous, driven leaders who are well prepared for post-secondary success and who strive to be agents of change in their communities and the world.

Stage 1: Explore (9th)	Stage 2: Discover (10th)	Stage 3: Understand (11th)	Stage 4: Lead (12th)
Core Units + Foundations of Embarc + My Life, My Journey ***Other Options*** + Change Agency: Student created service learning project	***Core units*** + Foundations of Embarc (if not in 9th grade) + My Story, My Voice + Our Community, Our Voice ***Other Options*** + College & Careers - Exploring my interests + Change Agency	***Core units*** + My Impact, My Purpose + My Network, My Brand ***Other Options*** + College & Careers - Understanding my choices + Roadtrip Nation + Exploring Your Passions and Your Path + Change Agency	***College & Career Mini Units*** + Preparing for post-secondary success + Financial Aid Award Letters + Financial Literacy ***Senior Mini Units*** + Finding Your Spark + Healthy Relationships + Revolutionary Mindsets + Change Agency

Lesson Structure

Embarc believes that students need a highly organized classroom, policies and procedures, and high expectations in order to be prepared for life after high school. Lessons included in the curriculum will support the need for

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

these elements of a successful classroom. Each day's lesson will include the following foundational components:

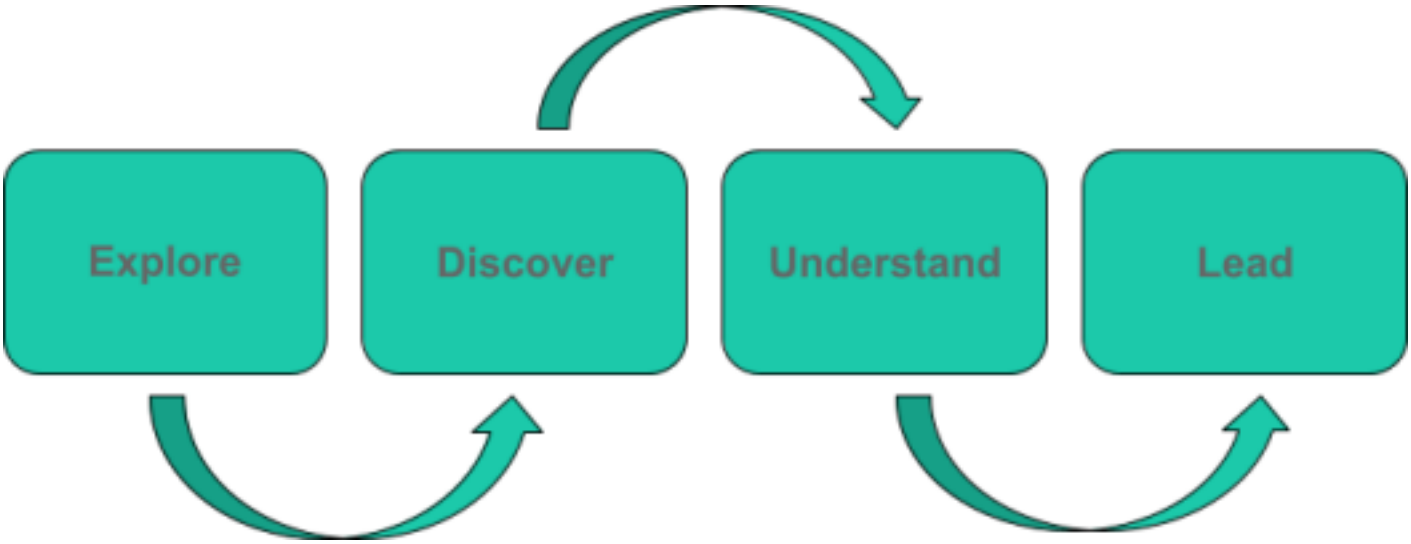
• **Materials**: Supporting materials, websites, and texts are provided in the lesson plan and included in the resource packet.

• **Procedures**:

- ***Opening Activity*** –short, structured activity that involves building background knowledge or activating student prior knowledge to begin thinking about the lesson for the day. The teacher will structure the opening activity so that it is short, concise, and meaningful to the day's learning.
- ***Learning***– the activity will build on the opening activity, deepening student understanding and giving safe practice time for learning.
- ***Reflection or Closing*** – short, structured exit ticket that will assess student learning for the day.

Outline of Stages

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0



© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Stage 1: Explore

Learning Goals:

• Become familiar with the variety of postsecondary pathways available and what those may lead to.
• Explore who they are as a student, a member of their school community, and society as a whole • Recognize personal qualities, interests, and skills and begin to envision what those can lead to • Develop their social skills by participating effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners and groups
• Develop leadership, drive, collaboration, curiosity, courage, and change agency by participating in team and individual challenges of exposure and exploration.

Stage 1 has an overall focus of exploration, which begins with building a classroom culture and community through team building activities, group projects and discussions. Throughout the course of Stage 1, students will be working collaboratively. The first unit gives them a chance to learn about one another and build trust. This is essential for development throughout the year.

As Stage 1 continues, students are exposed to pathways of post-secondary success. They are presented with countless opportunities to reflect on their identity and desires as they enhance

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

their understanding of high school and the world beyond.

Stage 1 offers a lot of opportunities for a student-centered classroom while ushering the students into a high school environment of autonomy and personal decision making and reflection.

Stage 2: Discover

Learning Goals:

• Increase their understanding of who they are as a student, a member of their school community and society as a whole
• Effectively relate their personal narratives in speech and written form
• Use their understanding of their identity to being to think about their post-secondary goals • Build community through increased communication, collaboration, and leadership skills • Develop their social awareness of their neighborhood, their community, and their city • Develop their project management skills by making strategic use of digital media to present their life experiences and connecting with others to see a project through to the end. • Develop their social skills including interacting positively with others and buildings and maintaining relationships

Stage 2 has an overall focus of discovery, which begins with a deep interrogation of the self and

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

one's experiences through group activities, discussions, readings, writings, and projects.. Throughout the course of Stage 2, students will be working collaboratively and sharing a lot of personal information. The first unit gives them a chance to learn about one another and build trust. This is essential for development throughout the year.

As Stage 2 continues, students are tasked with discovering what community means and how they define community for themselves. This discovery exposes them to different cultural aspects in the city, resources in their community, and options for post-secondary success. They are presented with countless opportunities to reflect on their identity and enhance their understanding of the classroom and community cultures through being introduced to a variety of perspectives.

Stage 2 relies heavily on a student-centered classroom. Embarc students learn by doing. The curriculum gives them the opportunities they need to put their new skill set into practice in and out of the classroom. Students are constantly reflecting on how to translate these lessons into steps towards post-secondary success.

Stage 3: Understand

Learning Goals:

• Think critically about social issues and inspiring change
• Increase their ability to reflect on their actions and how their actions affect their success and the lives of others
• Increase their ability to demonstrate honesty, humility, empathy, and resiliency • Increase their knowledge about working effectively with technology to present their ideas and life experiences
• Begin preparing for post-secondary success

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

• Understand the importance of understanding personal values when in pursuit of postsecondary options
•Develop relationships through networking that they can rely upon for post-secondary success. • Demonstrate a deep understanding of social skills including interacting positively with others, building and maintaining friendships, dealing with conflict, and dealing with fear

Stage 3 allows students to dig deeper into knowing and understanding who they are as individuals. The beginning of Stage 3 touches on strengthening the classroom community, and sets the focus of postsecondary planning through the lens of impact that is connected to one's personal values.

As Stage 3 continues, students will begin preparations for their postsecondary pathways through the development of their personal brand and networking skills as they delve into postsecondary exploration. Students will also be given significant amount of time to reflect and think about where they have been, where they want to go, and what resources they will need to get there.

At the end of Stage 3, students will combine their understanding of which postsecondary pathway they would like to follow with the knowledge of their personal values in a networking project that will highlight everything they have learned about themselves and their aspirations.

Stage 4: Lead

Learning Goals:

• Demonstrate a deep understanding of who they are, who they want to become, and what will drive their success.
Demonstrate a deep understanding of what it means to be successful in their post-secondary lives and what they need to do to reach their goals.
• Think critically to solve problems and determine solutions
• Develop a success plan that is attainable and maintainable
• Demonstrate mastery of social skills including interacting positively with others, building and maintaining healthy friendships, and dealing with conflict.

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

• Demonstrate a deep understanding of their ability to use their unique power for resistance, rebellion, and resiliency
• Increase their understanding of life skills including managing goals and time, being flexible, making decisions, and adapting to change

Stage 4 begins by revisiting what ignites a spark in each individual student and then identifying success paths towards postsecondary options. Students will work on applications towards those postsecondary pathways. They will also spend time applying for scholarships and FAFSA so they are completely prepared to achieve their postsecondary goals. The curriculum, in conjunction with school level metrics, will provide timelines, resources, and goal sheets to track student progress.

Stage 4 will also provide Embarc students with the tools they need to understand and be prepared for postsecondary life. Particularly, how to use their agency to make decisions, how to gain and maintain healthy relationships, and how to engage in the world with a revolutionary mindset.

Stage 4 closes with an action plan for success as students exit the Embarc program and begin their journeys as adults. They will reflect on the past years and identify tools they can use in the future to support their next steps or what they should do when the next step is unclear. They will graduate knowing where they are going and how they will get there. Embarc students will not only have access to their dreams, but they will persist in achieving them.

Unit & Lesson Topics

Stage 1: Explore

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

- **Week 0:**
  - What is Embarc?
  - What will Embarc do for me?
  - Embarc's Core Values
  - Norm Setting Protocol
  - Policies and Procedures
  - Embarc Expectations

- **Foundations of Embarc**
  - Curiosity: Building one's capacity to ask questions to explore more
  - Collaboration and Drive: Practicing teamwork through challenges
  - Leadership: Discovering my agency to contribute to this community
  - Courage: What can I discover when I act with courage?
  - Change Agency: Considering the impact I can have now
- **My Life, My Journey**
  - How would I define myself on this journey?
  - Who are the people I can rely upon? o What decisions do I tend to make and why? o What life do I want to envision for myself? o Creation Week: What decisions will you make to be successful in high school o Presentations

- **Change Agency**
  - Social Responsibility
  - The Inquiry Process
  - Developing and Expanding Your Network
  - Begin Professional Portfolios
  - Interview Skills
  - Mock Job Fair
  - Being Solution Oriented
  - Developing Plans for Change o Presentation/Implementation oaf Service

Stage 2: Discover

- **Week 0:**
  - What is Embarc?
  - What will Embarc do for me?

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

- Embarc's Core Values
- Norm Setting Protocol
- Policies and Procedures
- Embarc Expectations

- **My Story, My Voice**
- Who Am I and What is My Story?
- My Life as a Movie
- Spoken Word
- Story Corps
- Creation Week: Please Allow Me to Introduce Myself
- Presentations

- **Our Community, Our Voice**
- Defining Community
- Individualism and Community
- Intersectionality in the Community
- Ways to Stand in Solidarity
- Doing the Work of Belonging
- Exploring Individual Contributions
- Creation: Defining and Sharing our Community
- Presentations

- **College & Careers**
- College Exploration
- Career Exploration

- **Change Agency**
- Social Responsibility
- The Inquiry Process
- Developing and Expanding Your Network
- Begin Professional Portfolios
- Interview Skills
- Mock Job Fair
- Being Solution Oriented
- Developing Plans for Change
- Presentation/Implementation of Service

Stage 3: Understand

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

- **Week 0:**
  - What is Year 3 Embarc?
  - What will Embarc do for me in Year 3?
  - Embarc's Core Values Self-Assessment & Goals
  - Norm Setting Protocol
  - Policies and Procedures
  - Embarc Expectation

- **My Impact, My Purpose**
  - Learning Through Others
  - Exploring My Impact
  - Creation Week: Interactive Exhibit
  - Creation Week: Individual Exhibits on Impact
  - Presentations

- **My Brand, My Network**
  - Defining our Brand
  - Creating our Network
  - Defining Success and Failing Forward
  - Creation Week: Who am I as a professional
  - Presentation

- **Junior Postsecondary Exploration**
  - Career Exploration
  - College Exploration
  - Career Application
  - College Application

- **Change Agency**
  - Social Responsibility
    - Social Responsibility
    - The Inquiry Process
    - Developing and Expanding Your Network
  - Begin Professional Portfolios
    - Interview Skills
    - Mock Job Fair
    - Being Solution Oriented
    - Developing Plans for Change
    - Presentation/Implementation of Service

Stage 4: Lead

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

- **Week 0:**
  - What is Year 4 Embarc?
  - What will Embarc do for me in Year 4?
  - Embarc's Core Values self-assessment and goals
  - Norm Setting Protocol
  - Policies and Procedures
  - Embarc Expectations

- **Post-Secondary Success: Semester 1**
  - Finding your Spark
  - Financial Aid
  - Applications
  - Scholarships

Semester 2

  - Revolutionary Mindsets
  - Making a Decision
  - Healthy Relationships

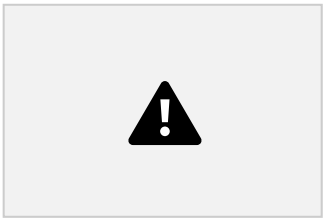
- **Post-Secondary Success:**

- **Change Agency**
  - Social Responsibility
  - The Inquiry Process
  - Developing and Expanding Your Network
  - Begin Professional Portfolios
  - Interview Skills
  - Mock Job Fair
  - Being Solution Oriented
  - Developing Plans for Change
  - Presentation/Implementation of Service

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Experience Overview

Experiences are personally curated events that stimulate the talent and skill-sets of an experience host while activating student voice. In a Whole School model, students participate in six experiences for each grade level to Chicago's top businesses, cultural institutions, and universities. The city becomes a classroom for students to learn, connect, and grow alongside their peers and teachers.

Collaboration	At a rock climbing gym, students dive into team challenges that push them and their peers to the limits.
Change Agency 	At an assisted living facility, students have the opportunity to play games and share a meal with individuals who live at a senior home.
Career	At an advertising agency, students brainstorm alongside professionals and dream up some much needed advertisements that build multicultural identities!

Arts & Culture	At a community-based art center, students learn the intricacies behind screen printing. Their staff help students take a hand-drawn idea and transfer it onto a t-shirt.
College & Post-Secondary Pathway Exploration	At a college campus, students eat in the dining hall and talk to current students to learn what life as a college student really entails.
Virtual	At a professional kitchen, students will be led through the science of taste by culinary experts. They will also prepare a meal alongside their peers.

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Teacher Support

Embarc provides weekly instructional support for all teachers implementing the program. Support can range from planning, co-teaching, observations, data analysis, professional development, or any other area the teacher feels needs attention. Due to the heavy support Embarc provides its teachers, strong, student-centered classroom environments are built over the course of time and teachers are able to see the results of their hard work in the form of student success.

Embarc Instructional Coaching Mission

Embarc Instructional Coaches are flipping the script on education by empowering teachers to be innovators and agents of change.

Embarc Instructional Coaching Vision

Embarc Instructional Coaching continuously fosters an impassioned, professional community of trailblazers who zealously embody Embarc and pursue every opportunity to grow and inspire change.

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

Teacher Support

Embarc Teachers will receive the following supports:

◊ **Professional Development**: All Embarc teachers will receive professional development before the school year begins that will include engaging simulations of the curriculum, as well as full training in logistics and successful implementation of the program. Teachers will also receive PD throughout the year that will continue to build on curriculum knowledge and program implementation.

◊ **Curriculum Support:** All Embarc teachers will be provided with an experiential education coach who will assist in implementation and support around successful instructional practices in and outside of the classroom. The curriculum coach will be available to all teachers throughout the school year for any needs they may have before, during, or after lessons.

◊ **Data Analysis:** The experiential education coaches will track specific data including mindsets, experience feedback, and attendance that will help inform

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

the teacher and the program as to where investment is needed.

◊ **Troubleshooting:** Regular check-ins will be provided to teachers in case they are encountering challenges in implementation of curriculum, instructional practices, or follow-through with the program expectations.

FAQs

How long will it take me to teach the course?

The curriculum includes multiple unit plans with individual lessons for each school day. Lessons are designed for 45-minute class periods. The curriculum includes four years of lessons that are tailored to grade level needs. While the curriculum has everything you need to implement, it is recommended that the teacher adapts the lessons to meet the student needs, interests and deepen understanding of particular topics. Thus, it is very likely that the units will last longer than the outlined 25 - 40 lessons.

Can I adapt or modify this curriculum?

Although it is important for the teacher to follow the trajectory of the curriculum in order to support all students in the learning process, the teacher has the autonomy to increase or scaffold lessons to meet the academic needs of the learners in the room.

In terms of instructional strategies, the curriculum is not designed for strict

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

conformity to a script, but rather for creativity and flexibility based on the teacher's knowledge of the students in order to broaden their horizons and build their knowledge bank.

As I teach this course, how can I provide feedback as well as share my experiences with other educators?

Teachers will be able to provide feedback for any lessons at any time they would like with their Embarc experiential educator coach. There will also be chances to collaborate and reflect with other Embarc teachers several times a year during professional development. Finally, there are lessons at the end of each unit for students to provide curriculum feedback. We welcome feedback in order to continuously improve our efforts to provide teachers and students with the best tools they need for a successful course.

FAQs

What do I need to teach this course?

All student facing materials are provided in the unit plans (this does not include technology or manipulatives). Many of the lessons can be adapted to use more or less materials.

Recommended Materials to have on hand:
- *Pens, pencils, paper*
- *Journals*
- *Post-it notes*
- *Projector*
- *Internet access*
- *Chart paper*

Space:
The ideal space for an Embarc class is one in which students can easily get up to move into a circle, or into another activity. The classroom should be

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

welcoming and encourage a culture for learning. Many activities involve movement, so it is important to keep that in mind when arranging a space.

Several lessons include a technology component, often requiring students to use computers or the teacher to project visual aids or segments of video. It is ideal for the classroom to be strategically placed next to a technology lab, and for the teacher to easily access a projector every day. Naviance will be used frequently in most cases, so Embarc teachers will need to have access to a computer lab during this time.

FAQs

Do the lessons in the guide align to academic learning standards?

Each lesson is aligned to specific cognitive and non-cognitive standards. The following standards are incorporated into Embarc lessons:

- ***ELA Common Core State Standards (Reading, Speaking and Listening and Writing)***
- ***21st Century Skills***
- ***Social Skills***
- ***Character Skills***

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

What are ways I can support and promote the success of this program?

There are a variety of ways teachers can ensure the success of the program. Embarc encourages teachers to:

- ***Regularly inform other teachers and administrators in the building via email about upcoming themes addressed in the curriculum.***
- ***Hold awards ceremonies that other teachers and administrators can attend.***
- ***Create a booth at report card pick-ups and parent nights to highlight the learning that is happening in the Embarc classrooms***
- ***Host community socials with Embarc students and families throughout the city to promote communication among schools.***

FAQs

What is my role and what are my responsibilities in teaching this course?

Since the overall goal of Embarc is to empower all students to be successful in their postsecondary journeys through exposure and experiences, it is imperative that Embarc teachers build an environment that fosters a culture for relationship building, curiosity, risk taking, identity exploration, learning, and goal setting. The

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

teacher has the most contact with the students and can be such a powerful presence, and the teacher's role is one of a mentor and a motivator. It is the teacher's responsibility to believe every student has the power to attain his or her goals and to build the necessary resiliency in the students to make that possible.

Another responsibility of the teacher is to maintain a culture of respect and rapport. Students should use the class time to build relationships, learn from one another and gain multiple perspectives. Because there will be a variety of thoughts and life experiences presented through discussions and presentations, it is the role of the teacher to mediate and ensure that every voice is heard and responded to with respect.

Finally, teachers will transition from deliverer of content to facilitator during Embarc classes. Embarc believes that students learn through doing and through their experiences. The role of the teacher is to facilitate those learning experiences and allow the students the chance to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from the process.

© Embarc · Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0